

OHS PROGRAM: 9 Elements of a Robust Safety Culture



Having a strong safety culture is critical to having an effective OHS program and to complying with both the OHS and environmental laws. The US Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement ([BSEE](#)), which works to promote safety, protect the environment and conserve offshore oil and natural gas resources on the US Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), recently published a policy statement of its expectations for the safety culture in organizations that perform activities which it regulates. Although the policy only applies to such organizations in the US, it provides useful guidelines for an effective safety culture in a company in any country and industry. Here's a look at the BSEE policy and the elements it says are critical to a robust safety culture.

The BSEE Safety Culture Policy

The BSEE explained that it didn't intend to mandate safety culture requirements, which it believed would be counterproductive. Rather, the goal for releasing the policy was to outline the critical traits that are present in a positive safety culture while initiating a constructive dialogue on how regulators, industries and the public can

collaborate on improving the overall safety on the OCS.

The BSEE policy defines safety culture as the core values and behaviours of all members of an organization that reflect a commitment to conducting business in a manner that protects people and the environment. The policy notes that it's critical for all organizations to foster in personnel an appreciation for the importance of safety and environmental stewardship, emphasizing the need for their integration into personal, company and government performance objectives to achieve optimal protection and production.

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The BSEE explains that experience has shown that a culture that promotes safety and environmental responsibility exhibits certain personal and organizational characteristics, which it defines as a pattern of thinking, feeling and behaving that emphasizes safety, particularly in situations that may have conflicting goals'such as production, schedule and cost versus safety and environmental protection.

The BSEE identified nine characteristics of what it calls a 'robust' safety culture. It adjusted these elements based on comments from industry stakeholders on the draft policy statement. Although there are additional traits that amplify or extend these nine characteristics, these basic characteristics are key to the development of an effective and functioning safety culture that recognizes the need to protect people and the environment first and foremost:

Leadership commitment to safety values and actions. Leaders demonstrate a commitment to safety and environmental stewardship in their decisions and behaviours. (See, '[Brief Senior Management: A Company's 'Safety Culture' Comes from the Top Down.](#)'

Hazard identification and risk management. Issues potentially

impacting safety and environmental stewardship are promptly identified, fully evaluated and promptly addressed or corrected commensurate with their significance.

Personal accountability. All individuals take personal responsibility for process and personal safety as well as environmental stewardship.

Work processes. The process of planning and controlling work activities is implemented so that safety and environmental stewardship are maintained while ensuring the correct equipment for the correct work.

Continuous improvement. Opportunities to learn about ways to ensure safety and environmental stewardship are sought out and implemented. (Watch this [recorded webinar](#) given by [Robert B. Hafey](#), author of [Lean Safety: Transforming Your Safety Culture with Lean Management](#), to learn some strategies for fostering an environment of continuous improvement in your workplace.)

Environment for raising concerns. A work environment is maintained where personnel feel free to raise safety and environmental concerns without fear of retaliation, intimidation, harassment or discrimination. (See, [Discipline and Reprisals Compliance Centre](#).)

Effective safety and environmental communication. Communications maintain a focus on safety and environmental stewardship.

Respectful work environment. Trust and respect permeate the organization with a focus on teamwork and collaboration.

Inquiring attitude. Individuals avoid complacency and continuously consider and review existing conditions and activities to identify discrepancies that might result in error or inappropriate action.

BOTTOM LINE

Assess your company's safety culture in light of the above attributes'how many of these characteristics does your company have' If it doesn't exhibit all or most of the attributes of a robust safety culture, take steps to address these deficiencies and improve your culture.

INSIDER SOURCE

'[Final Safety Culture Policy Statement](#),' US Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, published May 10, 2013